

Writing and Publishing

For Herself and Others



Lisa W. Cumming Photography

By Narielle Living

Sometimes truth makes good fiction, and sometimes truth needs a little poetic license on the road to becoming fiction, something Dawn Brotherton discovered when she wrote her first book, *It's The Right Thing To Do*. As a 2nd lieutenant, she was stationed at Whiteman Air Force base in Missouri.

"I had a bunch of really weird things happen to me when I was there. I had a stalker

and some scary stuff," she says. After telling her friends the story of what happened, they all encouraged her to write her story. "Finally, I wrote it down. Truth is never all that exciting, because here I am, and the story didn't have a clear end. I had to throw in some murders and make changes, so that's what started it."

Her first book centers around the character of Jackie Austin, a missile launch officer at

Whiteman. Although Dawn used some of her personal experiences to write the book, including the stalker aspect, much of the plot was added to enhance the story.

After writing her first book, Dawn assumed she was finished. Then her readers began asking for more about the character of Jackie. "People kept saying, we want to know more about Jackie, what's going on with Jackie?" Despite

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her apprehension that she didn't have another story to tell, Dawn continued to write, and later finished her second Jackie Austin novel, *Wind the Clock*. "Now the ideas are coming so fast that I don't have time to write them all down."

Dawn balances her career as a Colonel in the Air Force, writer and publisher with family life and community activities. Originally from Ohio, Dawn and her husband chose to retire in Williamsburg. "My husband is retired, but I'm still in," she says. "We built this house, and this will be where we spend our retirement. While I finish up my last few years I'm kind of coming and going, but my husband and kids are staying here. We love the area."

Dawn likes the fact that Williamsburg is big enough to have everything they want, such as stores and culture, but small enough to get to know people. "Being in the military and moving around all the time you get to know the people you work with very well," she says. "I can go almost anywhere in the world and have someplace to stay. But, it's neat here, because my girls are in sports, we have church, and now

we go out and see people at the store that we know. It's like you're part of the neighborhood, and you recognize people. It drives my kids crazy because we stop to talk to everybody."

When Dawn finished writing her first novel, she researched the world of publishing, and what she learned was surprising to her. "I found traditional publishers still have you do all the legwork, such as the advertising and promoting, and yet they take 65 percent of your royalties," she says. "I didn't think this was the dream of how it's supposed to happen." She also learned that sometimes it doesn't matter how good a book is, publishers and editors simply don't have time to read all the submissions they receive. "They get so many, they are overwhelmed," she says.

After learning those facts, she decided to publish her novel independently and set up her publishing company, Blue Dragon Publishing. "I knew marketing was going to be my issue, because marketing is not my strength. That's why I just got a marketing intern."

Once her company was established and her first book was published, other authors began

inquiring as to whether or not Dawn would publish their books. She was honest with each author and told them she was a very small independent publisher, and she didn't have the same connections as the bigger publishers. According to Dawn, authors needed to know that she was not able to be more than a springboard for their writing career.

"I didn't start this to make money. I started it to let other people in, to help them get their foot in the door. As a matter of fact, I even have a buyout clause in my contract that says if you get picked up by a big publisher I'll let you go. I also only take a very small percentage of the royalties, and that's for my legwork on getting the book published."

To date, Blue Dragon has published a wide range of genres, including a children's picture book, fiction and non-fiction. "The hardest one is mine, fiction," Dawn says, referring to her Jackie Austin series. "Fiction is the hardest thing to sell because there is so much of it."

Dawn has been adamant that her publishing company not focus on any one genre, but focus instead on the writer and what they need.

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"It's about getting them started. I feel that it gives them a little more credibility if they can put it on the query letter that they've been published once before. I think of myself more as a stepping stone than the final answer."

When she decides to publish a writer, Dawn states that the writer goes into the contract fully understanding the limitations of working with a small company. Authors are responsible for marketing their books, a huge thing for any writer to accomplish. "I don't market. I tell authors that right up front, so they will have to market themselves or pay someone to market. But I look at their story and listen to them." Dawn also offers advice on stories, and will tell people up front whether or not she thinks the book will sell. Sometimes authors don't care if the book will sell or not, but want to be published anyway. The only books Dawn will not publish are manuscripts that go against her moral beliefs and values.

"I would never print anything anti-Christian," she says. She will, however, work with authors on editing their manuscript, as long as they are open to the suggestions she offers.

As for her own writing, Dawn is currently working on the third book in the Jackie Austin series, currently titled *Truth Has No Agenda*. In this book, the main character accepts a position working at the Pentagon within the Sexual Assault Prevention Response office. The story unfolds as she is tasked with investigating sexual assault and harassment complaints within the military.

Dawn is also getting ready to release the second edition of her first book, *It's The Right Thing To Do*, under a new title. "I hate the title. It means something to me, it means something to Jackie, but it's not catchy, so I'm retitling and redoing the cover right now. I probably won't print any new ones until I'm out of stock."

Most authors who have written multiple books learn and grow as writers, and Dawn is no exception. She explains that as a result of her military career she developed a sparse writing style, without a large amount of exposition. Her first book, in particular, showcases that style. "It's a fast read because I don't have all that descriptive stuff. Some people like it and some people don't, but you can't please

everybody. So I am probably going to fluff it up a little bit in certain places for the second edition."

In addition to the Jackie Austin series, Dawn has begun writing a new series of young adult fiction about a girls' softball team. Each book will focus on a different character and theme, and Dawn is very excited about this new project.

"The first book is about a young girl whose parents don't want her to play ball, but she really wants to. The focus is on how she will get on the team without making her parents mad. Is she going to lie or tell the truth?"

Dawn's advice for writers is to not give up. "I'm sure everybody's heard that before, but it's out there, and if you want it bad enough you'll get it." She goes on to acknowledge that writing can be a frustrating career, but encourages writers to reach out to other writers. "Being in a writing group and having other people to bounce ideas off of has been fantastic. Get other people involved in your writing, bounce ideas off them. Don't give your book over to somebody, but share ideas." NDN

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